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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

January 29, 2003

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Subject: A/S BURNS DISCUSSES IRAQ PLANNING AND
PALESTINIAN ISSUE WITH SENIOR EMIRATIS
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S E C R E T ABU DHABI 00479

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
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INFO RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1126
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ABU DHABI 000479

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/NGA, NEA/IPA, NEA/ARP AND PMAT
NSC FOR ABRAMS AND CLARKE
CENTCOM FOR POLAD AMBASSADOR LITT
CENTAF FOR GENERAL MOSELEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/22/2013
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: A/S BURNS DISCUSSES IRAQ PLANNING AND
PALESTINIAN ISSUE WITH SENIOR EMIRATIS

REF: 02 Abu Dhabi 6694

¶1. (U) Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba,
Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

¶2. (S) In separate meetings on 1/21 and 1/22 with UAE Armed Forces Chief of Staff Muhammad Bin Zayid Al-Nahyan (MBZ) and de facto Foreign Minister Hamdan Bin Zayid Al-Nahyan, A/S Burns discussed U.S. policy towards Iraq and the Middle East peace process. On Iraq, and clearly worried about the unintended consequences of an armed conflict, the Emiratis recommended that we continue force deployments and intensify diplomatic pressure for a month or so to allow time for possible insurrection/regime overthrow from inside Iraq. If we do opt for military action, our "day after" actions will be key to shaping Arab public opinion and U.S.-Arab relations for years to come. Foremost among the UAE's concerns is a visible U.S. commitment to Iraq's territorial integrity, including forcibly resisting Kurdish and/or Shi'a attempts to establish independent homelands. Although they are "deeply discouraged" by U.S. policy towards the peace process, the Emiratis hope to see the U.S. seriously reengage on the Palestinian issue. In their view, tangible progress on this front is essential to pursuing a successful outcome in Iraq. The need to support Jordan figured prominently in Burns' discussions; his interlocutors indicated that the UAEG prefers providing Jordan with cash assistance and concessional loans in lieu of an oil subsidy. Perhaps anticipating future USG requests for financial assistance to Iraq, Hamdan explained the budgetary crunch facing the UAEG as a result of the two-year downturn in global financial markets. For the first time, he explained, the UAE is relying solely on its oil income as its return on its investments is "zero." Hamdan intriguingly inquired into U.S. plans for Arab military participation in coalition operations, noting that should Kuwait request assistance to bolster its self-defense, the UAE and other GCC partners would be obliged to respond positively. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (S) Participants: MBZ was attended by his assistant, Yousef Al-Otaiba. Al-Otaiba also joined for the Hamdan meeting, along with MFA Undersecretary for Political Affairs Abdullah Rashid Al-Nuaimi and Hamdan's office director, Sultan Al-Romaithi. The Ambassador and Polchief (notetaker) were present at both meetings while Captain George Dom from JCS attended the Hamdan meeting.

MBZ: GIVE "INSURRECTION" A CHANCE

¶4. (S) With regard to Iraq, A/S Burns noted the President's absolute determination to disarm Saddam Hussein. Although a final decision has not been made, Burns estimated that we were moving inexorably closer to the point of using force as a last resort. He noted the near-term importance of remaining in close contact and consultation with our friends and allies. Appreciative of the UAE's support for our contingency planning, Burns underscored the need to keep the pressure on Baghdad. Burns expressed appreciation for UAE support for contingency military requirements, and suggested that we may need to make further requests. The U.S., he continued, fully understands the enormous challenges and complexities posed by the prospect of an Iraq conflict.

¶5. (S) In response to a question from Burns on how Saddam reads the U.S., MBZ said "loud and clear." In the Chief of Staff's view, the U.S. message is being received in Baghdad; the leadership is scared and he expects that people will start defecting. He advised that we should provide ample time (i.e. six weeks) for an insurrection, an option that would save many lives and stem regional instability. Should military action prove unavoidable, MBZ predicted that the north and south would fall easily. In that event, he recommended that the U.S. focus its efforts on Baghdad but cautioned against street fighting and hand-to-hand combat

noting that it would be far more prudent to wait Saddam out. A few days without food and water would sow discord among Saddam's pampered cronies. In the meantime, ordinary Baghdadis could be taken care of through the establishment of humanitarian centers on the city's outskirts.

BURNS: THREE-PHASE APPROACH TO IRAQ PLANNING

16. (S) In response to a question on U.S. plans regarding the future of Iraq, Burns noted that Washington's thinking had evolved considerably over the last few months and we are actively planning for the "day after" scenario. The Iraq operation has been divided into three phases, Burns explained, with the first phase focused on stabilizing the security situation and the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance. Phase two would include a strong security presence, reconstruction, and the transition to civilian rule. This period would witness the strengthening of existing institutions, such as the Iraqi civil service, and perhaps the formation of an Iraqi advisory council to begin to prepare for restoration of full sovereignty. We also recognize the enormous difference between Afghanistan -- a country stripped bare of its infrastructure and basic institutions -- and Iraq, with its educated population base and long history of civil society. In phase three, Iraq would move towards full sovereignty.

DAY AFTER: U.S. COMMITMENT TO IRAQI TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY
KEY FOR BUILDING CONFIDENCE

17. (S) Both MBZ and Hamdan asserted that U.S. handling of the day after will affect America's standing in the region for years to come. If the U.S. is seen to be committed to Iraq's territorial integrity, i.e. actively resisting Kurdish and/or Shi'a attempts to carve out a homeland, this will be welcomed in the Arab world. If we allowed a break-up, it would destroy U.S. credibility and stature in the region. Burns assured his Emirati interlocutors that our political and military strategies recognize the need to avoid a fractured Iraq in the post-Saddam era. MBZ expressed slight regard for the exiled Iraqi opposition, acidly noting that if an election were held he would be surprised if 1 out of 100 of the oppositionists were voted into office. He predicted that it would be difficult to contain the political aspirations of these exiles and that they could easily, and publicly, turn on the U.S. in the event that they feel their needs are not being met in the critical transition period.

18. (S) In response to a question from MBZ on U.S. plans to provide humanitarian assistance, Burns said we are working closely with international agencies and looking at ways to use existing mechanisms, such as the oil-for-food program to meet immediate needs for water, provision of health care and basic foodstuffs and amenities. We realize, Burns stated, that the Iraqis have become dependent on the UN distribution system and the black market, both of which could collapse in the event of a conflict.

IRAQ-PEACE PROCESS LINKAGE: U.S. NEEDS TO REMAIN ENGAGED
WITH ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

19. (S) Both Al-Nahyan brothers worried that an Iraq conflict could trigger massive rioting and instability in the occupied territories. In that instance, the Emiratis fully expect Sharon to react forcefully, thus increasing the chances the situation would spiral out of control. The Emirati message was clear: active U.S. engagement on the Palestinian issue is essential to a successful outcome in Iraq. Hamdan said pointedly that the UAEG, and the Emirati people as a whole, have all but lost hope for an active engagement and a more balanced U.S. policy. Nevertheless,

they continue to recognize that the U.S. is an important partner and critical to achieving a just peace. He hoped that Washington would pay serious attention to the desperate situation in Israel and the territories, warning that a conflagration on two fronts, i.e. Iraq and Palestine, would be disastrous for the region. Burns emphasized the President's determination to push ahead toward the two-state vision he has outlined. Burns thanked the UAEG for its generosity to the Palestinian people, noting that he had personally seen how UAE funds are being used in the rebuilding of Jenin. The U.S. was equally concerned about containing violence on the Lebanon-Israel border and Burns noted he had raised the issue earlier in the day in a meeting with Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad. MBZ encouraged further U.S. engagement with Syria but said it would also be helpful if others, including the Europeans and Arab states, made a point of meeting with Bashar to press him to "act sensibly."

ALL AGREE ON NEED TO SUPPORT JORDAN; UAE PREFERS CASH
ASSISTANCE TO OIL SUBSIDY

¶10. (S) The effect of an Iraq conflict on regional stability was a major topic in Burns' discussions with both Hamdan and MBZ. Noting the fact that King Abdullah had just visited the UAE (where he attended an investors conference in Dubai and met with Shaykh Zayid in Abu Dhabi), MBZ said he is most concerned that in the event of U.S. action against Iraq, the Jordanian street could become the point of ignition for instability across the region. Inflammatory Al-Jazeera broadcasts showing Iraqi casualties as a result of a U.S. air raid or gun battle could spark rioting in Jordan and Egypt. In MBZ's view, thought should be given to how to manage the Arab media in the event of war; the first images from liberated Iraq will be critical in the shaping of Arab public opinion.

¶11. (S) Burns expressed U.S. appreciation for Emirati offers of assistance to Jordan. The U.S. is doing its part to bring some relief to the hard-hit Jordanian economy via an immediate \$130 million cash transfer, Burns explained. Hamdan briefed that he is in receipt of a letter from the Saudis proposing a Saudi-Kuwaiti-UAE offer to supply oil to Jordan in the event of U.S./coalition action against Iraq. He noted that the Saudis and the Kuwaitis each appeared ready to supply 50,000 barrels a day. If this was sufficient to meet Jordan's oil need, the UAE, Hamdan noted, preferred providing cash assistance. He briefed that the Abu Dhabi Development Fund had signed an agreement to provide \$50 million in project aid to Jordan and that the UAEG had decided in the last several days to provide a further \$25 million in direct cash assistance in order to meet immediate GOJ needs. (Note: It is not clear whether this \$25 million is in addition to, part of, or instead of the \$45 million in cash assistance which Hamdan briefed to Ambassador on December 9 -- see reftel. End Note.)

¶12. (S) Here, Hamdan paused to explain that the dramatic downturn in the markets post 9/11 had badly hurt the UAEG's overseas investment portfolio. Where once the Emiratis relied on their overseas income, for the first time this year (i.e. 2002) the return on this income was zero and the government has been forced to rely solely on the UAE's oil income. In a conversation earlier in the week with the Ambassador, Hamdan elaborated that the UAEG lost \$30-40 billion in its investment portfolio (estimated at between \$150-175 billion) while at the same time facing an increase in the federal budget and the UAE's overseas assistance commitments i.e. to the Palestinians, Afghans, Pakistanis, Moroccans, Lebanese and Egyptians, to name a few.

HAMDAN HINTS AT INVITATION FOR ARAB ALLIED MILITARIES
TO JOIN IN IRAQ CAMPAIGN

¶13. (S) In an unexpected move, Hamdan inquired as to plans

to invite Arab allied militaries to join the coalition. As if answering his own question, Hamdan offered that were the Kuwaitis to bring the matter before the GCC in the context of defending Kuwait, the UAE (and other GCC partners) would be obligated to participate under the terms of the GCC mutual defense agreement. Burns replied that the UAE's interest would be welcomed and promised to follow up.

14. (U) This cable has been been cleared by A/S Burns.

WAHBA